



Binding and Loosing Part Two

By Bob DeWaay

In Part One of *Binding and Loosing* we saw from Scripture that binding and loosing concerned both the terms of entrance into the Kingdom and the authority to declare God's mind on matters of doctrine and practice. However, some have interpreted binding and loosing to be the authority to bind Satan and demons through verbal declaration, a misunderstanding primarily based on **Matthew 12:28, 29**: "*But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.*" This statement was Jesus' response to His critics who claimed that he cast out demons through "Beelzebul" (the ruler of demons).

Matthew 12:28, 29 offers Jesus' own interpretation of the deliverances they had just observed—that these were done by the Spirit of God and showed the power of the kingdom of God in the person of Christ. In these deliverances, Christ confronts the powers of darkness, and Christ is victor! The Pharisees should have recognized this and committed themselves to Christ, but they were unwilling. Jesus goes on to warn them about blaspheming the Holy Spirit (verse 31) by accusing Christ of being of the Devil.

The key verse, which some claim as support for "binding" Satan through direct verbal assault, is **Matthew 12:29**. In this passage, Jesus uses a metaphor to illustrate His own mission. A strong man controls his own house until a stronger man comes, binds him, and plunders the house. "Bind" in this metaphor means "to tie up with a rope." It is used literally. "Binding and loosing" when used together in other settings are technical terminology where to "bind" is to obligate, to "loose" is to remove obligation as we showed in the previous article. "Bind" in **Matthew 12:29** is in a different context and is part of the metaphor.

Consider **Luke 11:21, 22** which records the same illustration. Luke does not use the term "bind," but says the stronger man "...attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied..." (**Luke 11:22**). So "attacks and overpowers" describes the same concept as "bind" in **Matthew 12:29**. This is a realistic story with a spiritual application. The application is that Jesus is the stronger man who

has power over Satan and can and does plunder his “house.” The deliverances proved Jesus’ power over Satan.

Therefore, “bind,” as used in Matthew 12, is metaphorical terminology, not a magic word, the utterance of which will stop the activity of evil spirits. That the Luke account does not even use the word “bind” shows this. “Bind” is incidental to the picture of a strong man's house being plundered. Whether victory is accomplished by binding, overpowering, or disarming, it is not as consequential as the fact that it is a stronger man who must do it.

The casting out of demons, however, is a precursor to the greater work of plundering Satan’s “house” that Jesus would carry out through the cross. The Bible consistently ties the conquest of Satan's kingdom of darkness and the liberation of its subjects to the Incarnation, which leads ultimately to the cross. The stronger man is Jesus, not us. When the author of Hebrews says that it was “through death” that Jesus would render the devil powerless to hold his captives, he can only be referring to the cross where Christ paid for our sins: *“Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives”* (**Hebrews 2:14, 15**). We were in bondage to Satan, not because of his great power, but because of our own sins which put us under the penalty for sin, which is death.

For further light on this, consider the following passage:

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Colossians 2:13 – 15)

The margin of the NASB, as quoted here, has a note indicating that the last “Him” could be “it, i.e., the cross.” Christ triumphed over the forces of darkness through the cross. If the “goods” of **Matthew 12:29** are people held in bondage, then the “binding” of the strong man that accomplished their release was through the cross.

We can better understand this by contemplating how it was that humanity first came into this bondage. The book of Hebrews describes human bondage as the “fear of death.” We know that death is the penalty for sin. Satan's first lie, as recorded in Genesis 3, was that Eve could sin and not die as God said she would. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, sin entered human experience for them and all of their descendants. As Paul declares in Romans, the wages of sin is death. **Romans 5:12** explicitly says that sin and death spread to all because of the original sin. We were born sinners by nature, children of wrath (**Ephesians 2:3**), in bondage to the “strong man.” Spiritual death was our present reality, and ultimate death our certain destiny, unless God did something to rescue us! It is no wonder that the passage in Hebrews 2 calls human bondage, “The fear of death.”

The way Christ was ultimately to “bind” the strong man and plunder his goods was to die a substitutionary death on the cross, paying the penalty for us. Now liberated by faith from spiritual and eternal death, we walk in victory because of the power of God. Christ's victorious encounters with demons prior to His death on the cross were demonstrations of His Messianic mission and His power over evil. However, they were not an end in themselves. Had Jesus not gone on to die for our sins, the “houses” (**Matthew 12:43-45**) that had been “swept” clean would have remained empty, inviting places for evil spirits to return. Those delivered from particular spirits during the public ministry of Jesus were still spiritually dead sinners like everyone else. They needed to have the penalty for their sins to be paid, so that if they responded in faith to the gospel, they would be born of the Spirit and their “houses” thus filled. These were delivered from certain demons, but still needed to be transferred as individuals from the house of Satan into the Kingdom of God (**Colossians 1:13**).

The Gospel of John also shows the importance of the cross in the defeat of Satan and the deliverance of people from his domination. During the week immediately preceding His crucifixion Jesus said “*Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world*

shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” (**John 12:31, 32**). The next verse tells us explicitly that Jesus was speaking of His death on the cross. The casting out of Satan and the drawing of men (previously “bound” by the Evil One) to Christ is accomplished through the cross! This confirms our interpretation of **Matthew 12:28, 29**.

The Bible does speak of an actual future “binding” of Satan in the book of Revelation:

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. (**Revelation 20:1 - 3**)*

Some also link this to the cross and claim that the thousand years is figurative language for all of church history. Two strong points of evidence mitigate this interpretation. 1) The binding of Satan through the cross is only efficacious practically in the lives of believers. The “nations” are still very much deceived by Satan and even blinded to the gospel (**2Corinthians 4:4**). Individuals are delivered from Satan during the church age, but not entire nations. 2) Whatever “binding” happened to Satan in **Revelation 20:2** he is eventually “released from” according to **Revelation 20:3**. The effects of the cross are eternal; never will there be a “release” from what God did through Christ on the cross. Therefore, on exegetical grounds, I conclude that this passage is talking about the future millennial reign of Christ during which Satan is “bound” in the abyss and has no access to those living during this time.

No passage in the Bible instructs believers to say, “I bind you Satan,” as if that would change anything. If we are concerned, as we should be, about seeing people delivered from their bondage to Satan, then we should preach the gospel. When Paul asserted that Satan blinded the eyes of the unbelieving, it was in the context of his defense of

preaching the unadulterated gospel (see **2Corinthians 4:1-6**). God provides no other means of deliverance from bondage to Satan apart from the cross. Through the cross those who believe are transferred from Satan's kingdom to Christ's as we see here: "*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*" (**Colossians 1:13, 14**). And for this we are thankful—it is sufficient.

Critical Issues Commentary

www.cicministry.org

©2008

Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures taken from the New American Standard Bible, © Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, 1995 The Lockman Foundation.